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Continental West Germanic
is no OV language



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back. 

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Heinrich Siemens (2013)

Continental West Germanic (CWG) is defined by the property that the finite verb (V_1) precedes its complement; the infinite verbs ($V_i, i \geq 2$) follow it. Characteristics such as the verb bracket (Verbklammer, 1a) and the base word order in the infinite verb cluster with descending indices (1b) immediately follow from this definition:

- (1a) WF 'k een₁ de koning van Engeland gediend₂.
Pdt Etj hab₁ dem enjlischen Tjeenich bedient₂.
SG Ich habe₁ den englischen König bedient₂.
I have the King of England served
'I served the King of England.'
- (1b) Pdt
Hee saul₁ sette₆ bliewe₅ deawe₄ jewullt₃ habe₂.
SG
Er soll₁ sitzen₆ bleiben₅ dürfen₄ gewollt₃ haben₂.
He is reported to seated remain may wanted have
'He is reported to have wanted to be allowed to remain seated.'

WF = West Flemish

SG = Standard German

Pdt = Plautdietsch (concerning Plautdietsch (ISO 639-3: pdt),
former West Prussian Low German, cf. Siemens 2012)

This definition includes four language groups: the High German, Low German, Dutch and Frisian varieties. Two of these languages—High German and Dutch—are standard languages of European countries; the others receive increased recognition within the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The most closely related languages, English and Scandinavian, do not fit this definition (any more) and Yiddish has become a borderline case.

If the specific differentiation of this definition is unique on a universal level, then the following characteristic is even more surprising: in the embedded clause the finite verb is not in the position stated above, but rather in the right verb bracket. The finite verb even appears after the infinite verbs:

(2a) WF

dan 'k ik den koning van Engeland gediend₂ een₁.

Pdt

daut etj dem enjlischen Tjeenich bedeent₂ hab₁.

SG

dass ich den englischen König bedient₂ habe₁.

that I (I) the King of England served have

'that I served the King of England.'

(2b) Pdt

daut hee sette₆ bliewe₅ deawe₄ jewullt₃ habe₂ saul₁.

SG

dass er sitzen₆ bleiben₅ dürfen₄ gewollt₃ haben₂ soll₁.

that he seated remain may wanted have is reported to

'that he is reported to have wanted to be allowed to remain seated.'

In the 1970s the thesis that Continental West Germanic is an OV language and that the word order of the root clause is constructed

by moving the finite verb into the complementizer position (or by adjunction to this position—which is irrelevant to this study), was derived from the word order of the embedded clause (cf. 13ab).

This thesis appears implausible for several reasons. If it is generally surprising for the base word order to be that of the embedded clause, then the assumption that a child of 18 months pointing to an object and asking *Ist das?* (‘[What] is that?’) could derive that question from an embedded clause (which does not yet exist in the child’s grammar) by moving the finite verb to the beginning is completely counterintuitive. In Continental West Germanic, not only does the finite verb appear before the object in the root clause, but there are also many more prepositions than postpositions and *CP* is invariably head-initial: the usual criteria of language typology do not suggest an OV language.

In the following pages, I will prove that the OV thesis is invalid. The central lemma of my argument is:

- (3) Lemma: (a) If a scope-bearing element is moved, then the meaning is unaltered. (b) If an element is moved from the scope into a position left of the scope-bearing element, then it eludes the scope—even if it leaves a trace in the scope.

Before we talk about the movement of a scope-bearing element, I would like to provide some information regarding from where the scope-bearing element is to be moved. In order not to limit myself to the assumptions of a particular theory from the very beginning, let us allow two different possibilities: in the first case, the scope-bearing element is a head (for example of a *NegP*) with the scope as its complement. This head is either in front of

(4a) or behind (4b) its complement. The second case is looking at the scope-bearing element like a modal adverb (5), which is base-generated on the right edge of the middle field (6, 7). This adverbial position can also be occupied by various elements in many different orders (8). In this second case, a c-command relation of the scope-bearing element to its scope is not possible because it is base-generated within the scope. The scope is *itali-cized* in the following examples:

- | | | | | | |
|------|-----|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| (4a) | WF | <i>t</i> _{NEG} | <i>J' is</i> | <i>nie</i> _{NEG} | <i>gekomen</i>]. |
| | Pdt | <i>t</i> _{NEG} | <i>[Hee ess</i> | <i>nich</i> _{NEG} | <i>jekome</i>]. |
| | SG | <i>t</i> _{NEG} | <i>[Er ist</i> | <i>nicht</i> _{NEG} | <i>gekomen</i>]. |
| (4b) | WF | | <i>[J' is</i> | <i>nie</i> _{NEG} | <i>gekomen</i>] <i>t</i> _{NEG} . |
| | Pdt | | <i>[Hee ess</i> | <i>nich</i> _{NEG} | <i>jekome</i>] <i>t</i> _{NEG} . |
| | SG | | <i>[Er ist</i> | <i>nicht</i> _{NEG} | <i>gekomen</i>] <i>t</i> _{NEG} . |
| | | | he | AUX.3SG NEG | come.PASTPART |
| | | | 'He has not come.' | | |
| (5) | WF | | <i>J' is</i> | <i>echt</i> | <i>gekomen</i> . |
| | Pdt | | <i>Hee ess</i> | <i>wertjlich</i> | <i>jekome</i> . |
| | SG | | <i>Er ist</i> | <i>wirklich</i> | <i>gekomen</i> . |
| | | | he | AUX.3SG really | come.PASTPART |
| | | | 'He really has come.' | | |
| (6) | WF | | <i>J' is</i> | <i>nie</i> | <i>gekomen</i> . |
| | Pdt | | <i>Hee ess</i> | <i>nich</i> | <i>jekome</i> . |
| | SG | | <i>Er ist</i> | <i>nicht</i> | <i>gekomen</i> . |
| | | | he | AUX.3SG NEG | come.PASTPART |
| | | | 'He has not come.' | | |
| (7) | WF | | <i>J' is</i> | <i>twee keers</i> | <i>gekomen</i> . |
| | Pdt | | <i>Hee ess</i> | <i>tweemol</i> | <i>jekome</i> . |
| | SG | | <i>Er ist</i> | <i>zweimal</i> | <i>gekomen</i> . |
| | | | he | AUX.3SG twice | come.PASTPART |
| | | | 'He has come twice.' | | |

- (8) WF *J' is echt nie twee keers gekomen.*
 Pdt *Hee ess wertjlich nich tweemol jekome.*
 SG *Er ist wirklich nicht zweimal gekommen.*
 he AUX.3SG really not twice come.
 'He really has not come twice.'

The first part of lemma (3a) is, strictly speaking, impossible to prove. In order to prove this statement, all possible cases would need to be examined, and this would be much too extensive for the current study as well as for any other study. I rely on the acknowledged observation that the scope, as long as nothing else speaks against it, is not determined by the linear structure of the materialized sentence (phonetic/written/gestural, etc.), but rather already by its basic constituency structure (cf. e.g. Blühdorn 2012: 351, 449). In (4ab) we see that movement of the negator into the scope is obligatory in c-command reconstruction, of course without any change in meaning. As Jespersen (1917) already recognized, the meaning does not even change when the negator crosses clause boundaries (The different possible traces (cf. 4ab, 6) are in parentheses):

- (9) WF
 'k geloven niet_i, dat (*t_i*) [*je* (*t_i*) *gekomen is*] (*t_i*).
 Pdt
 Etj jleew nich_i, daut (*t_i*) [*hee* (*t_i*) *jekome ess*] (*t_i*).
 SG
 Ich glaube nicht_i, dass (*t_i*) [*er* (*t_i*) *gekommen ist*] (*t_i*).
 I believe NEG that he come AUX.3SG
 'I don't think that he has come.'

The word order in the scope of (9) is different from that in the root clauses (4–8). However, at this time it is still unclear which

order we would like to take as a base. For this reason, neither indices nor traces are given.

All of this constitutes, of course, not proof of the first part of lemma (3a), but that part is to the best of my knowledge relatively undisputed. Where lemma (3) differs from previous literature (cf. Blühdorn 2012: 351, 449 once again) is clause (3b). It is claimed that an element can move out of the scope and through this movement elude the scope.

The basis of my argumentation can be found in the grammatical position of the verbs in a verb cluster in West Flemish (cf. Haegeman 1992), Swiss German, and Plautdietsch. The geographical location of these varieties (extreme West, East, and South) shows the typical distribution pattern of a relict. Such sentences were surely grammatical in other Continental West Germanic varieties, too, but these sentences became ungrammatical through prescriptive grammar and through an education which relied on prescriptive grammar in centrally located standard languages.

The following example of verbal adjunction (cf. Siemens, forthcoming) is taken from Haegeman (1992/2009:113, which is reconstructed by verb projection raising). I have added a similarly grammatical translation into Plautdietsch:

(10a) WF

da Jan Marie twee kiers deeg₁ [*da boek lezen*] t₁
Pdt

daut Jan Marie tweemol leet₁ [*daut Bok lese*] t₁

(10b) WF

da Jan Marie twee kiers [*deeg₁ da boek lezen*] t₁
Pdt

daut Jan Marie tweemol [*leet₁ daut Bok lese*] t₁

that Jan Marie twice made that book read

(10c) WF

da Jan Marie deeg₁ twee kiers [*da boek lezen*] t₁
Pdt

daut Jan Marie leet₁ tweemol [*daut Bok lese*] t₁
that Jan Marie made twice that book read

These variations beg the question of whether or not leftward movement of the finite verb influences the scope. The word order in (10ab) is ambivalent. It remains unclear if Jan caused one or more readings twice or if Jan caused two readings once; *twee kiers* can refer to *da boek lezen* (10a) or *deeg da boek lezen* (10b). In (10c), on the other hand, *twee kiers* can only refer to *da boek lezen*; in other words Jan caused both readings at the same time. The scope-bearing element (*twee kiers*) can only refer to a following verb and not to a preceding verb. Movement of the finite verb to the left, if moved far enough away, can reduce the number of possible interpretations of a sentence: if the finite verb is moved so far to the left that it remains left of the scope-bearing element, then it eludes its scope—even if it leaves a trace in the scope.

A similar effect can be seen in multiple negation. Multiple negators can operate independently of one another, and in SG they have to function this way: every negator has its own negating power, double negation cancels itself out. However, in many Continental West Germanic varieties, multiple negators agree and therefore only one negation appears various times. This phenomenon is also seen in Romance, Slavic and Baltic languages. Even if the negative concord is the unmarked case in most Continental West Germanic varieties, it remains unclear as to whether or not a comparable Standard German interpretation could be meant here (11a, cf. Haegeman 1992/2009:115). Here, the leftward movement of the finite verb between both negators reduces

ambiguity (11b). Whenever the finite verb eludes the scope of the second negator and therefore both negators have different scopes, then both negators cannot agree:

(11a) WF

da Jan Marie [an niemand geen boeken deeg₁ geven] t₁
Pdt

daut Jan Marie [tjeenem tjeene Betja leet₁ jewe] t₁
that Jan Marie to no one no books made give

(11b) WF

da Jan Marie [an niemand deeg₁ geen boeken geven] t₁
Pdt

daut Jan Marie [tjeenem leet₁ tjeene Betja jewe] t₁
that Jan Marie to no one made no books give

If one were to explain examples (10, 11) using verb projection raising instead of leftward movement of the finite verb, then one would have to choose other formulations and note other traces:

(10c') WF

da Jan Marie t_k deeg [twee kiers da boek lezen]_k
Pdt

daut Jan Marie t_k leet [tweemol daut Bok lese]_k

(11b') WF

da Jan Marie an niemand t_k deeg [geen boeken geven]_k
Pdt

daut Jan Marie tjeenem t_k leet [tjeene Betja jewe]_k

However in both cases the following holds true: if the verb is positioned before the scope-bearing element as a result of the reordering process (verbal adjunction or verb projection raising), then it eludes its scope—even if it leaves a trace in the scope; this proves lemma (3b).

Haegeman (2001, 2002) reconstructs negative concord in WF by assuming that the negators head distinct projections, *NegP* and *PolP* (polarity, emphasizing or reinforcing sentential negation). In some languages there can be multiple copies of the *Pol*-Negator. In order to avoid an exponential blow-up of structure I suggest not to assume a distinct projection for each copy, but just to adjoin the copies to the left of the constituents. In Russian, e. g., all these copies look alike, in Plautdietsch there are some different allomorphs:

(12a) Russian

(čto) ni_jkto ni_jgde ni_jkogda ni_jkomu ni_jčego ne dal.

(12b) Pdt

(daut) tjeena noanich niemols tjeenem nuscht nich gauf.
 (that) no one nowhere never to no one nothing NEG gave.

Lemma (3) has fundamental theoretical consequences because an argument in favour of the theory that Continental West Germanic is an OV language lies in examples in which the negator relates to the finite verb. If the finite verb is base-generated in the root clause in the left sentence bracket, then according to the claim it finds itself outside of the negation scope. What follows is the argument that the finite verb has to be base-generated to the right inside the scope (13a) and then moved into the complementizer position in the root clause, leaving a trace in the scope (13b, cf. e. g. Bayer 2008):

(13a) Pdt daut Jan Marie nich halpe bruckt.
 SG dass Jan Marie nicht zu helfen braucht.
 that Jan Marie NEG to help need.3SG
 ‘that Jan hasn’t got to help Marie.’

- (13b) Pdt Jan_S bruckt_{t₁} t_S Marie nich halpe t₁.
 SG Jan_S braucht_{t₁} t_S Marie nicht zu helfen t₁.
 Jan need.3SG Marie NEG to help
 ‘Jan hasn’t got to help Marie.’

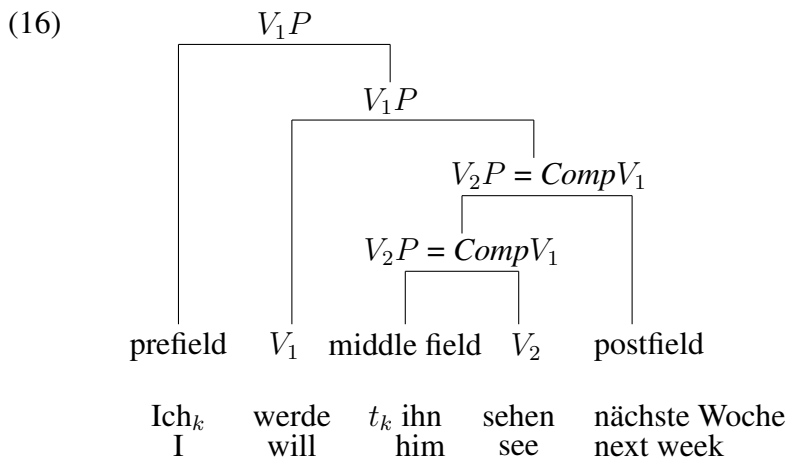
As we have seen, a verb that is generated to the right of a scope-bearing element, and finds itself left of the scope-bearing element by means of restructuring, eludes its scope. The negation in (13) can however only refer to the matrix verb *braucht*. How *braucht* comes to be in the scope of negation must now be explained. First, because of lemma (3) it is clear that it does not help to generate the finite verb on the right and move it to the left. The fact that the trace remains is irrelevant:

- (14) The reconstruction of Continental West Germanic as an OV language fails to explain sentences like (13).

But let us go back to the question of how *braucht*, in a sentence like (13), finds itself in the scope of negation. If we look at *nicht* as a sentence adverbial, it is clear that regardless of its position (and the position of the verb) it has scope over the matrix verb *braucht*. Let us assume that scope (in the example: *Braucht Jan Marie zu helfen*) is complement of negator (cf. 4b). In a declarative sentence, the subject is topicalized and the adverb *nicht* is moved forward like in sentence (4b). This movement does not change the scope domain. This reconstruction is independent of whether or not *braucht* is a modal verb (like in Plautdietsch) or if it is a part of a *to*+infinitive construction (like in Standard German):

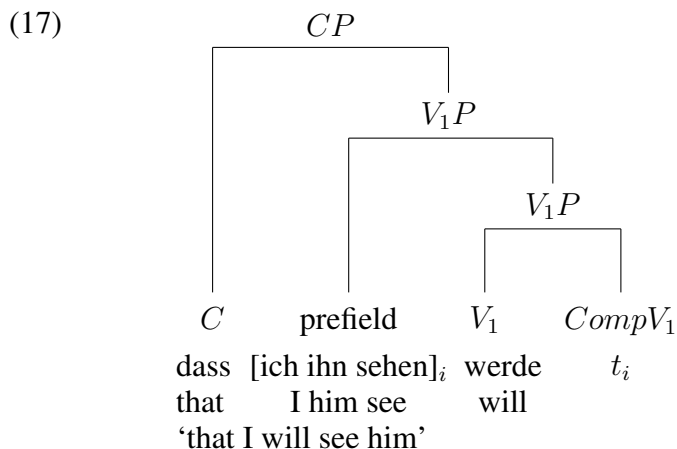
- (15) Pdt [*Jan_S bruckt t_S Marie nich_{NEG} halpe*] t_{NEG}.
 SG [*Jan_S braucht t_S Marie nicht_{NEG} zu helfen*] t_{NEG}.
 ‘Jan hasn’t got to help Marie.’

If the reconstruction of Continental West Germanic as an OV language is false, how can we solve the problem? In Siemens (forthcoming), I suggest generating the finite verb in the left sentence bracket and the infinite verbs in the right sentence bracket, so that the definition stated in the beginning of this paper describes not only the materialized form of a sentence, but also the basic constituent structure. The finite verb in (4–8) and (15) therefore does not move according to this approach: Continental West Germanic is only an OV language with regard to infinite verbs (contrary to Kayne 1994); it is, however, a VO language with regard to finite verbs. In the root clause the prefield can be occupied by adjunction of a constituent (not necessarily the subject) to get a V2 word order, the postfield is the landing site for extraposition or right dislocation:



If there is a complementizer, it does not only trigger the movement of a constituent (like the subject in 16) in front of the finite verb, but also the movement of the lower segment of the whole complement $CompV_1$ (excluding the optionally adjoined postfield) to get the word order of the embedded clause. The finite

verb, being the left bracket in the root clause, becomes the right bracket in the embedded clause without moving. The word order of an embedded clause is just a special case of V2. There are no different clause types like V1, V2 or V-final, the clauses are uniform, meaning they have an identical underlying structure. Only the extent of the adjunction to the left of the finite verb varies:



Prefield expletives are base-generated in the prefield, they never occur in the middle field. In embedded clauses with a complementizer, *CompV₁* is moved to the prefield, in this way banishing the expletive. Therefore in Continental West Germanic there is no prefield expletive in embedded clauses:

(18a) SG Es sind Menschen auf der Straße.
 EXPL are people in the street.

(18b) SG dass (*es) [Menschen auf der Straße]_i sind *t_i*.
 that (*EXPL) people in the street are.

For more details of my approach see Siemens (forthcoming).

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